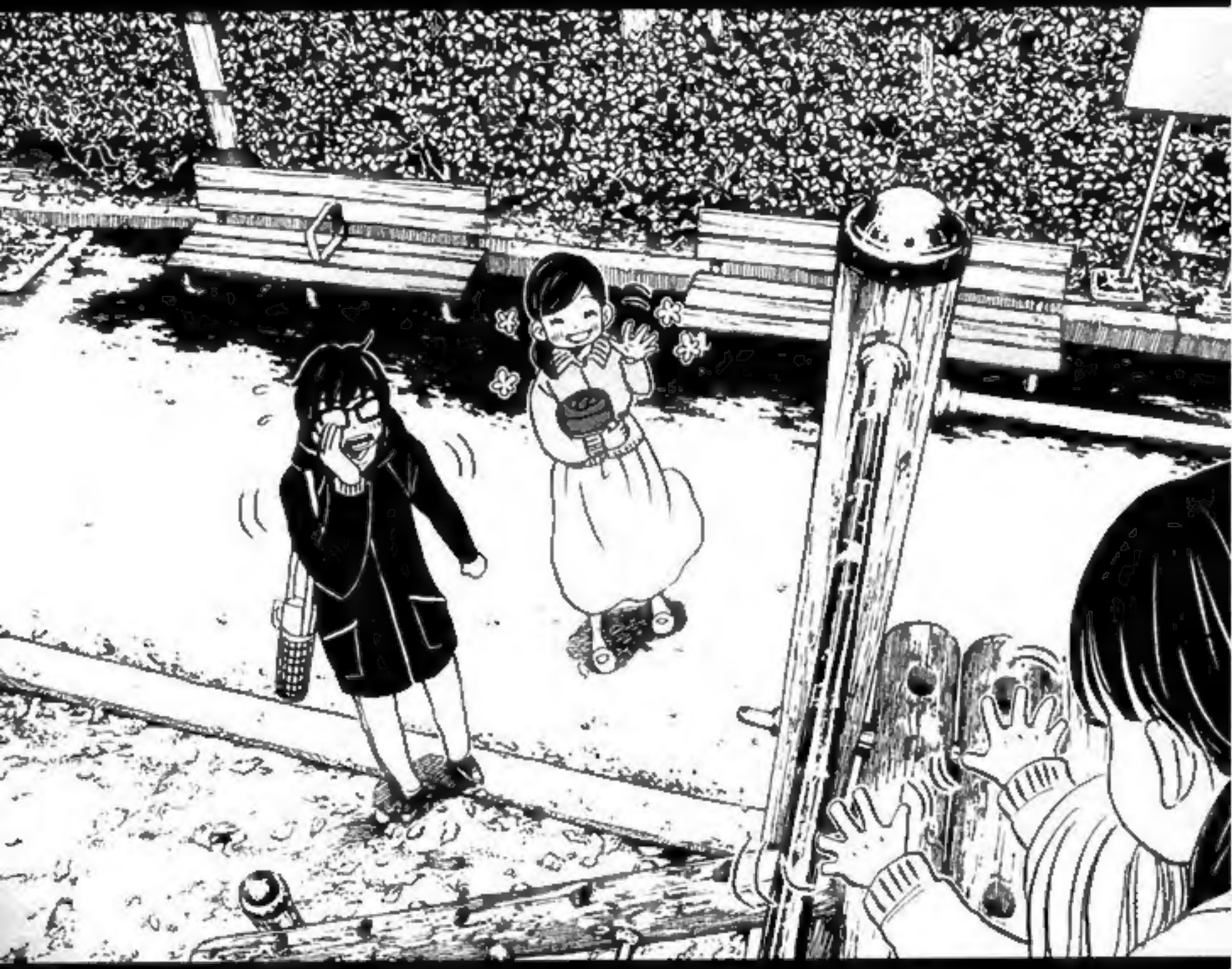


Chapter 39

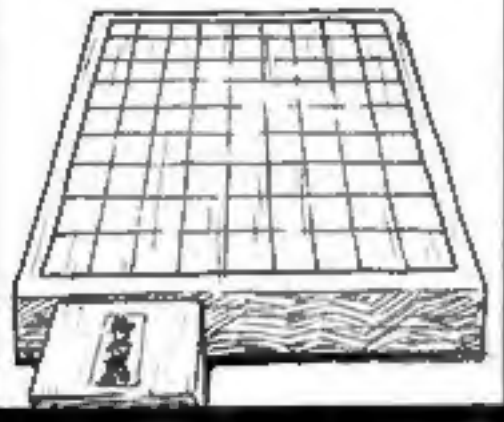
The night passes

THERE WERE NO BOYS MY OWN AGE, I GREW UP NEVER PLAYING SOCCER OR BASEBALL (NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE)

THERE WERE MORE COWS AND CHICKENS THAN PEOPLE. AND THE PEOPLE THAT WERE THERE WERE ALL OLD PEOPLE.

THE PLACE I GREW UP WAS A VILLAGE IN THE NORTHEAST, CONSTANTLY UNDER SNOW.

A SHOGI BOARD HAS ALWAYS BEEN A NATURAL PART OF MY LIFE, SINCE I WAS A BABY.



THIS PIECE IS THE KING, AND THIS IS THE GOLD GENERAL.

THE SILVER GENERAL

THE BISHOP

THE ROOK

THE OLD MEN IN THE NEIGHBOR-HOOD TAUGHT ME TO PLAY SHOGI.

BUT, EVEN AFTER I GREW ACCUSTOMED TO THAT LIFE, THERE WAS THAT ONE WINTER DAY ...

MY PLAYTIME WAS SPENT COLLECTING BUGS, PLAYING VIDEO GAMES, AND READING.

I WAS ALLOWED TO PLUNGE INTO IT AD DEEPLY AS I LIKED.

THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW NO MATTER HOW MUCH I PLAYED.

BUT SHOGI

GAMES, COMICS, BOOKS, THEY ALL CAME TO AN END RIGHT AWAY,

Through the introduction of the Hall owner, I became a student of master Oouchi and it was decided I would participate in the Tokyo invitational.

WOW

This kid is good.

And there my game got better and better.

By my third year in elementary school I began taking a bus to attend a local Shogi hall.

By the time I was a 2nd year in elementary school, I could beat any of the old men in town.

The men of the village, little by little put their faith in me.

KAI IS AMAZING!

IT COULD VERY BE THE NEXT MEIJIN WILL COME OUT OF THIS SLEEPY LITTLE VILLAGE!

And in winter I'd tend to the livestock, cows and such.

I would work as a farmhand, picking the apples and peaches, up until the fall,

I went to Shogi tournaments twice a month.

To raise the funds to continue playing

As a middle schooler Tokyo still seemed like a far off place.

Taking the red-eye bus ...

I set off to the invitational,

and the encouragement of my Shogi Club,

and the support of the old men,

Through my earnings,

EVEN SO THE OLD MEN FROM MY VILLAGE CONTINUED TO SUPPORT ME.

2 EXPRESS BUS TOKYO

I HAD GONE FROM A BIG FISH IN A SMALL POND, TO A SMALL FRY IN A SEA OF SHARKS.

Shogi Hal

I WAS STUCK IN THEM FOR THREE YEARS.

THE 3-PART LEAGUE WAS A DEN OF OGRES JUST LIKE I'D HEARD.

AT ABOUT THAT TIME I STARTED NEEDING THESE?

I COULDN'T TELL ANY MORE.

OR WAS IT BOTH?

WAS THE CREAKING COMING FROM THE SEAT, OR MY OWN CHEST?

I BEGAN TO WONDER

TRAVELLING ONWARD INTO THE INFINITE NIGHT ROAD.

THE SQUEEKING CREAKING SEAT ON THE NIGHT BUS,

TO GO TO WASTE.

I DIDN'T WANT THE SUPPORT EVERYONE HAD GIVEN TO ME,

BUT,

LIKE A NIGHTMARE I COULDN'T ESCAPE FROM.

IT FOLLOWED ME WHEREVER I WENT

DING DONG.

STILL WITH ME, EVEN NOW.

THAT PAIN

.....

IS PROBABLY

OW ...

OH,

KIRIYAMA,

OH NO PLEASE, DON'T GET UP.

I BOUGHT A LOT OF STUFF, I WAS JUST PUTTING IT AWAY IN THE FRIDGE.

SORRY, GIVE ME A SECOND.

I'M HAPPY TO DO IT,

I'M ON SUMMER BREAK NOW,

HAVE YOU HAD LUNCH YET?

UH, NO

JUST SOME NATTO EARLIER ...

HUH? WHAT WAS THAT?

MR. KOUDA'S BEEN HAVING STOMACH PAIN?

DO YOU WANT EGG IN IT?

OH

clang

P P P P P P P

I KEPT THAT IN MIND. SOMEHOW.

THIS WAS HELPFUL TO DAD WITH HIS STOMACH PAIN...

JUST WAIT FOR A MINUTE.

bub bub bub

I BROUGHT SOME UDON, WANT ME TO HEAT IT UP?

I'LL MAKE IT SOFT SO IT'S EASIER TO EAT.

YEAH, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO KEEP THAT DOWN.

SORRY FOR THE TROUBLE

MMM

THIS IS REALLY GOOD.

YEAH

I FEEL LIKE I CAN KEEP THIS DOWN.

I'M GLAD.

OH! WOW!

THAT'S THE KIND OF PARENT HE IS.

NO... SO THAT'S IT...

PLEASE.

OH YES.

MY STOMACH'S ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY.

IT NEVER HURTS WHEN I'M ACTUALLY PLAYING THE GAME.

YEAH...

BUT IT'S OKAY, ISN'T IT?

UM... IS THAT REALLY TRUE?

HEY SHIMADA.

OH? BUT WHY?

I'M GONNA HEAD HOME NOW.

THE 4TH GAME IS IN 5 DAYS TIME.

SHOULDN'T YOU BE FOCUSING YOUR ATTENTION ON FEELING BETTER? IF YOU KEEP PUSHING YOURSELF...

4-6 BISHOP ?!

NOW IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT...

weeze

FWUMP

FWAP

EVEN THOUGH I THOUGHT "THIS WILL WORK" AS I MADE MY MOVES, I STILL WOUND UP GETTING TRAPPED BY HIM.

I PLAYED TRYING NOT TO LAND MYSELF IN ANY SEALED MOVE SITUATIONS, BUT THE GAME TOOK ITS NATURAL COURSE.

YEAH..

BUT THIS LAST MATCH...

IT HAS BEEN TROUBLING ME.

GOTCHA

HE COULD HAVE FINISHED ME OFF BEFORE LUNCHTIME?!

THAT'S TOTALLY TERRIBLE! WHICH MEANS...

BUT I COMPLETELY OVERLOOKED THE BISHOP ON 4-6!!

I THOUGHT THE 6-5 PAWN SHOULD TAKE THE SAME SILVER, THEN THE ROOK ON 5-5 TO THE LANCE ON 6-6,

NOT THE 6-6 SILVER, IT WAS THE SAME SILVER!!

YOU SHOULD BE RESTING NOW.

YEAH I KNEW IT.

YEAH? UM, HUH?

WAIT, WHAT WAS I JUST TALKING ABOUT?

SO I JUST WOUND UP TOSSING AND TURNING ALL NIGHT, AND...

AND IT MADE MY STOMACH START THESE STABBING PAINS...

SO THEN, IT GOT TO BE I WAS STUCK IN THOUGHTS LIKE "ISN'T THERE ANY WAY I CAN HOLD OUT AGAINST THIS GUY?"

whap whap

thump thump

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING AT ALL, ARE YOU?!

WOW

SO, I'LL PLAY A STATIC ROOK OPENING, AND YOU'LL USE A RANGING ROOK THEN?

I GOT IT.

YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT.

IS THIS REALLY ALRIGHT?

I MEAN, AM I EVEN BEING USEFUL TO YOU?

HM?

UM...

click

clack

.....

BUT

IS PLAYING AGAINST ME REALLY GIVING YOU ANYTHING IN RETURN?

I'M JUST A C1. STUDYING THE GAME OF AN A-RANK LIKE YOURSELF, SHIMADA, IS INCREDIBLY USEFUL.

IT SEEMS LIKE I'M THE ONLY ONE GAINING ANYTHING, DOESN'T IT?

UM, HOW TO EXPLAIN IT...

UM... HOW TO SAY IT...

I WANT TO SAY "IT GIVES ME A WRENCHING FEELING IN MY STOMACH"?

OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT

LIKE WHEN YOU SAID

HUH?

YOU SAY

FROM TIME TO TIME.

THE SAME SORT OF THINGS

"3-7 SILVER

WHEN SOYA SAW THE SILVER ON 3-7, WHEN WE WERE IN THE WAITING ROOM,

HE SAID THE SAME THING

IT GIVES ME A WRENCHING IN MY STOMACH"

HE SAID.

.....

YOU TWO ARE ALIKE, KINDA.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN WHY

IF I HAD TO CALL IT SOMETHING, YOU SHARE THE SAME OPINIONS, MAYBE?

OF COURSE, YOU BOTH HAVE ALL-AROUNDER PLAYING STYLES TOO.

LIKE HOW YOU FLEXIBLY MOVE YOUR GAME FROM OFFENSE TO DEFENSE

OR YOUR JUDGEMENT ON WHEN IT'S GOOD TO PRESS YOUR OPPONENT...

SO

WHEN YOU SIT ACROSS FROM ME AND PLAY IN YOUR OWN STYLE

I CAN GRASP MORE OF HOW SOYA PLAYS HIS GAME, I THINK.

I DON'T THINK IT'S QUITE ENOUGH TO GET WHERE I NEED TO BE,

BUT I THINK IT'S VERY HELPFUL.

GRAND MASTER SOYA.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS HE?

HMM?

OH YES, THAT'S RIGHT

WHEN YOU HAVE AS MANY TITLES AS HE DOES,

YOU DON'T SHOW UP IN SHOG HALLS OFTEN,

EXCEPT TO RENEW YOUR LICENSE MAYBE

YES..

HE'S.

YES.

HE'S LIKE A BIRD.

A BIRD?

YES,

HE'S

SILENT AND WHITE. HE SORT OF GLIDES IN.

LIKE A HERON OR A CRANE

ONE OF THOSE HUGE SLENDER ONES.

YOU KNOW THE STORY "THE TORTISE AND THE HARE?"

IT'S SIMILAR, BUT HE'S MORE THAN A HARE

RIGHT, INSTEAD OF A HARE, HE'S LIKE A BIRD.

LOOKING UP AT SOYA, IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A TURTLE, LIKE A BUG CRAWLING THE EARTH.

NOT TRYING TO BE SELF DEPRICATING, THAT'S JUST THE IMAGE HE GIVES

BUT IN THE STORY

THE HARE LOSES

THE HARE, OVERCONFIDENT, TAKES IT EASY

BUT SOYA

AS YOU'D EXPECT OF SOMEONE LABLED AS A *"GENIUS"*

DOESN'T SLACK OFF

THOUGH I SAY

"I CAN'T CLOSE THE DISTANCE,"

I'M NOT SAYING

THAT'S A REASON I CAN'T ADVANCE.

PUSHING ME TO TURN PRO, GUIDING ME THROUGH MY RANKING BATTLES.

BEING THAT HE WAS THE SAME AGE, SOYA WAS THE WIND IN MY SAILS, ENCOURAGING ME TO IMPROVE.

NO MATTER HOW HIGH HE RISES, HE NEVER BECOMES OVERCONFIDENT IN HIS OWN ABILITIES.

I WAS ALWAYS WATCHING

NO MATTER HOW FAR I GO, I CAN'T CLOSE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US.

NO, IT'S OK...

I'VE BEEN SEEING ONE ALREADY.

BUT SHIMADA ...

I KNEW WE SHOULDN'T DO THIS TODAY...

SHIMADA ?!

MMM!!

OW...

A DOCTOR! LET'S GET YOU TO THE DOCTOR!

I'VE BEEN DEALING WITH THIS PAIN SINCE I WAS TEN YEARS OLD. IT'S A COMMON THING.

I HAVE LOADS OF MEDICINE FOR THIS,

DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT GOING TO PUT IN MY BEST EFFORT.

JUST BECAUSE HE'S "UNSURPASSABLE"

OK THEN...

WOULD YOU MIND KEEPING ME COMPANY

A LITTLE LONGER?

SORRY FOR ASKING YOU TO COME HERE WHEN I'M IN THIS PATHETIC STATE...

WILL YOU STOP?

I DON'T MIND AT ALL.

SUSHIIII

SORRY...

KIRIYAMA, COULD YOU GET ME SOME WATER?

HAAA

STILL GOING, HUH?

I CAN'T TRAIN MY ORGANS TO ADJUST TO THIS LIKE I HAVE.

OH...

SURE!

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I EARNED THE RIGHT TO CHALLENGE HIM.

I CAN'T GO DOWN WITHOUT PUTTING UP A FIGHT.

THAT WOULD BE THE ONE THING

I COULDN'T FORGIVE MYSELF FOR.

I MEAN, NOT AS LONG AS THEY'VE GOT

THAT RIDICULOUS BANNER HANGING IN THE TRAIN STATION OF MY HOME TOWN.

BUT, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M RESIGNED TO DEFEAT EITHER...

NOT YET.

RIGHT NOW,

I'M THE ONLY PERSON FROM YAMAGATA ABOVE B-RANK.

SO,

I'VE GOT TO DO THIS.

TO KEEP THAT BANNER

RIGHT WHERE IT IS

HANGING IN THE SAME PLACE,

I CAN'T LET THEM DOWN.

Tendou City - Japan Shogi Federation

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Chapter 39